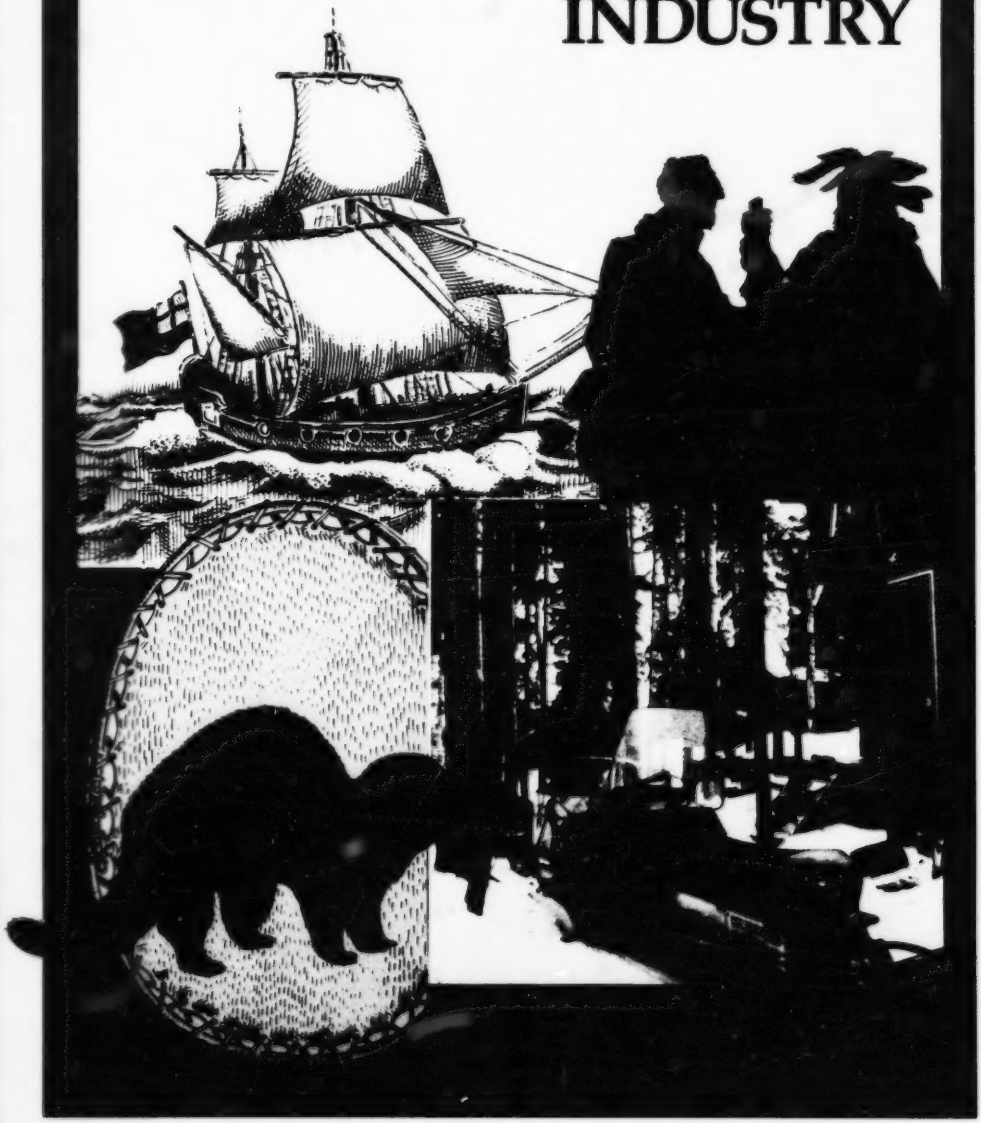
A HERITAGE SUSTAINED

MANITOBA'S WILD FUR INDUSTRY



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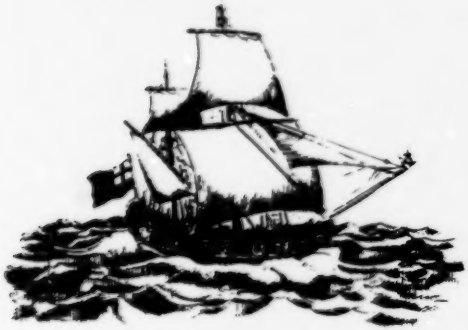
A HERITAGE SUSTAINED MANITOBA'S WILD FUR INDUSTRY

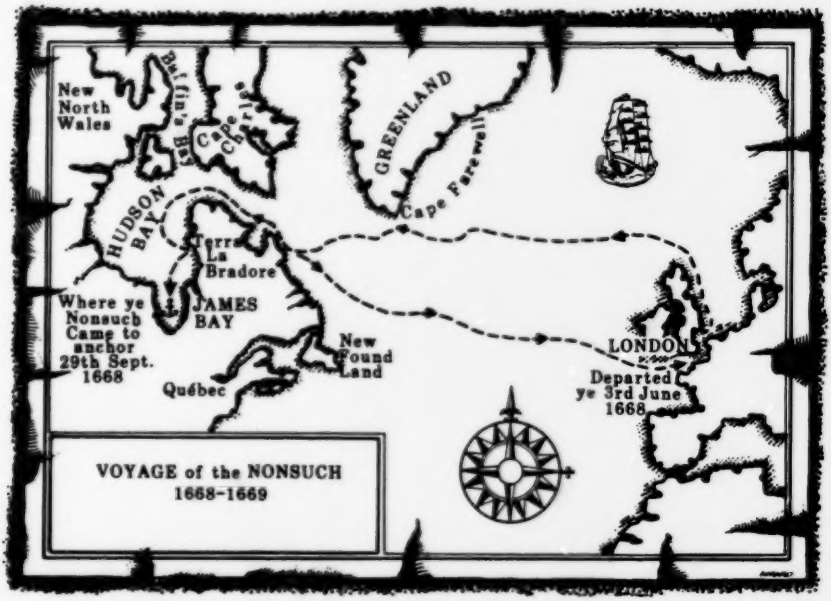
Introduction

Spanning some 300 years, the fur industry in Manitoba has been instrumental in the province's exploration and economic development. This valuable and abundant resource lured men like LaVerendrye, Radisson and Groseilliers, and countless others with its promise of riches. Fierce competition eventually threatened the very existence of this resource and cost some men their lives. In more recent times, following the recovery of most species, new threats to the resource have been posed by increasing urbanization and the spread of agriculture. Today it is vital to the resource and the trapper's way of life that national conservation measures are taken to sustain this heritage forever.

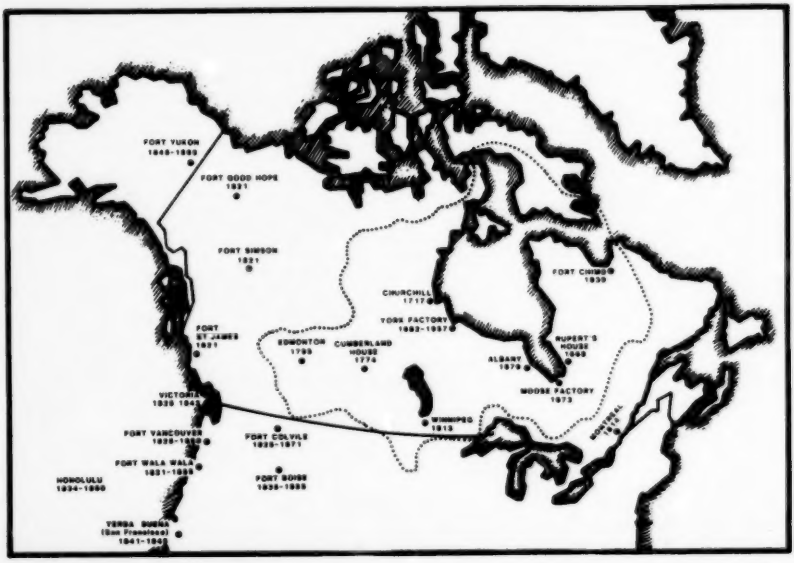
The Rise and Fall of the Fur Trade



In 1612 Captain Thomas Button planted the Union Jack on the shores of Hudson Bay near the mouth of the Nelson River. By 1668, with English financial backing, the French explorers Radisson and Groseilliers returned to the area to begin trading for furs with the Natives.



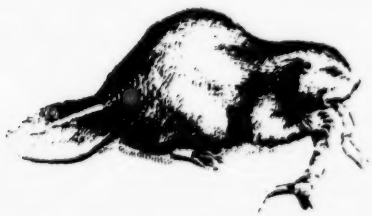
The explorers' first shipment of pelts to England soon prompted King Charles I to grant a charter to "The Governor and Company of Adventurers Trading into Hudson's Bay." Thus, in 1670 the Hudson's Bay Company was able to claim exclusive trading and administrative rights over all the territory drained by the rivers flowing into Hudson Bay. Known as Rupert's Land, this area covered almost half of North America. By 1682 the company had built its first permanent trading post in northern Manitoba at York Factory on the Hayes River.



Huge fortunes could be made by selling furs to satisfy the demand created by European fashions. Rival fur traders soon disputed the claim of the Hudson's Bay Company to exclusive trading rights and set up competing companies. During the following century and a half, the most serious threat to the official authority came from the North West Company, established in 1784. The intense rivalry between these two companies in the next fifty years drastically depleted the fur resource and brought both companies close to ruin. Finally, in 1821 a merger between the two firms under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company reduced the trapping pressure on the meager population of fur-bearing animals. Then, in 1826, the company introduced the first formal conservation measures in Canada. These initial measures consisted of setting quotas for the number of beavers that could be taken during a season and refusing to trade for summer-killed beaver that were not of prime quality.

With the arrival of the Selkirk settlers in 1812, the fur trading economy gradually gave way to an agricultural economy. Farming settlements continued to encroach on traditional fur harvesting territories. By the early part of the 20th Century fur trapping as a viable livelihood became restricted to the northern half of the province. Even in this northern region, however, the results of 200 years of intense harvesting were evident. Fur-bearing animals became hard to find, and some individual species almost disappeared.

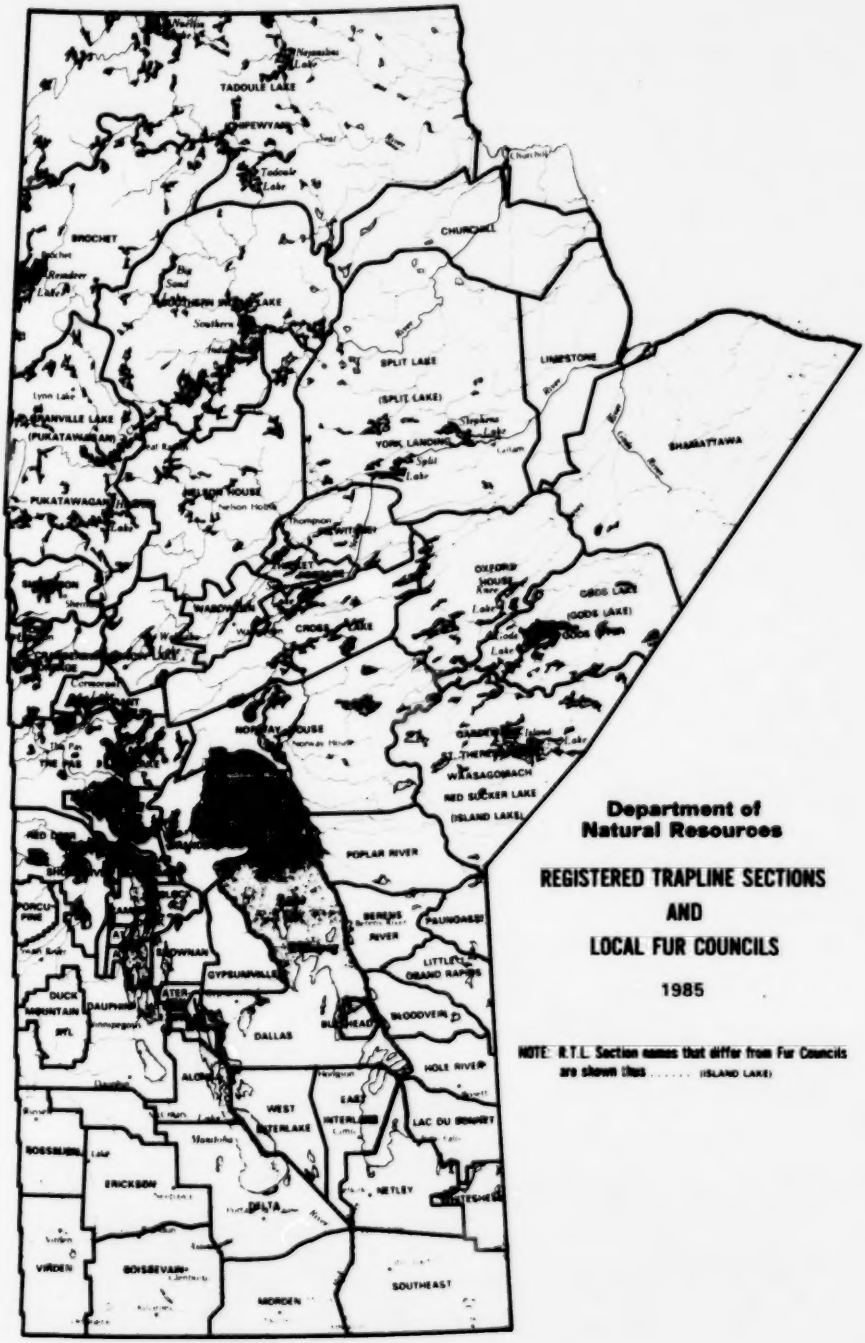
As the search for furs became more difficult, conflicts between trappers increased. Trappers from depleted areas were forced to move into their neighbor's territory. This controversial practice, in turn, placed additional pressure on the remaining fur-bearers. The supply of fur-bearing animals decreased even further. Finally, conflicts between trappers and the decline in fur-bearer populations reached a crisis level during the depression years of the thirties. Placing even greater pressure on the scarce resource, unemployed men from urban areas in the south moved north in a desperate attempt to extract a living from the once bountiful wild fur harvest.



Rebirth of the Trapping Industry

During the 1930's the province experimented with several new procedures to promote fur production. To increase the muskrat population and provide employment for specific groups of trappers, the Manitoba government designated certain regions of the province as fur rehabilitation blocks. These blocks contained man-made dams and dykes that allowed stable water levels to be maintained in prime muskrat habitats such as the 700,000 acre delta and flood plain region of the Saskatchewan River near The Pas. Fur ranching was also promoted during this period, but it now contributes only 25% of all provincial fur production.

The most successful long term measure for bringing about a controlled fur harvest, however, was the Registered Trapline System.



Department of Natural Resources

REGISTERED TRAPLINE SECTIONS AND LOCAL FUR COUNCILS

1985

NOTE: R.T.L. Section names that differ from Fur Councils are shown thus ..... (ISLAND LAKE)

This system assigned specific trapping areas or traplines to each trapper or Indian band. In return for such exclusive trapping rights, each RTL trapper was responsible for managing the harvest of all fur-bearers in his trapline area to ensure sustained production over the years.

The RTL system was implemented in the 1940's in the following manner: Crown lands in the northern and eastern parts of the province were divided into 23 RTL sections with the close co-operation of government, trappers and the fur industry. The boundaries of these sections were usually easily recognized features such as rivers, lakeshores, railways and heights of land. Permits were required to trap in these areas and were issued only to established professional trappers living in the district.

Each section was further subdivided into RTL divisions by the local trappers. Where necessary, small signs were placed on lines that were not easily recognized by natural features. Each division represented the area that a registered trapper felt was traditionally his. In practice, disputes were generally settled by mutual agreement. Today there are 42 RTL sections, some are now located in replenished areas of southern Manitoba.

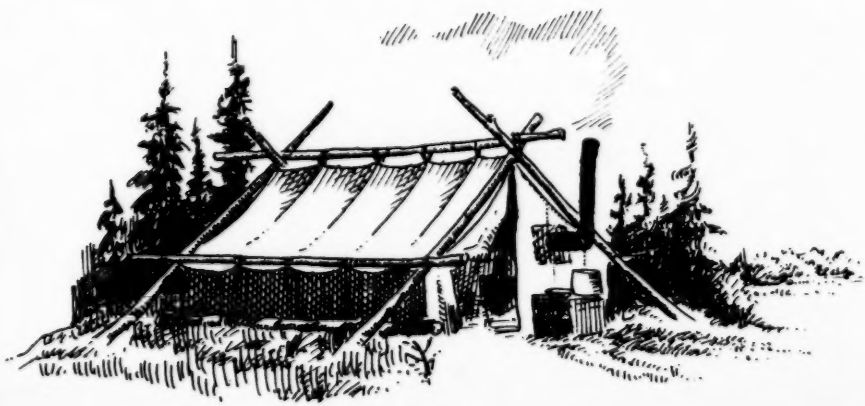
The Manitoba Trapper

Today almost 17,000 Manitobans rely on trapping to supplement their income from other sources, such as fishing, guiding and farming. About 3,200 trappers are associated with the RTL system while the remainder, known as "Open Area" trappers, must either own property or request permission of the appropriate landowner any time they wish to harvest furs in a particular region. Both kinds of trappers can usually make a profit from their efforts, but professional RTL trappers generally achieve a higher income. For example, the average income for RTL and Open Area trappers is $2,000 per year, while some professional RTL trappers have earned as much as $20,000 per year.

In contrast to the early days of the fur trade, contemporary trappers use snowmobiles instead of dog teams. This reduces their travel time from months to weeks. As well, most RTL trappers belong to local and national trapper associations and participate in provincial trapper education programs to improve such skills as pelt handling, equipment repair, and marketing procedures. Nevertheless, in some areas of the north a generation of skilled trappers is growing old and is not being replaced. Alternative employment opportunities are a factor. The need for trappers' children to attend school is another. The cost of buying new equipment is also a concern, while the fluctuating fur prices are always an issue.

Total Value of Wild Fur Exports and Ranch Fur Exports from Canada 1975-1984

Year	Total Value $	Ranch Total Value $	Total Export Value $
1975-76	34,167,853.00	19,774,861.00	53,942,714.00
1976-77	47,768,848.00	24,255,085.00	72,023,933.00
1977-78	47,675,472.00	25,544,687.00	73,220,159.00
1978-79	79,065,553.00	43,251,787.00	122,317,340.00
1979-80	84,891,914.00	48,039,708.00	132,931,622.00
1980-81	72,011,315.00	47,379,066.00	119,390,381.00
1981-82	58,014,969.00	49,087,354.00	107,102,323.00
1982-83	46,839,019.00	44,291,029.00	91,130,048.00
1983-84	41,810,479.00	49,172,917.00	90,983,396.00



The Manitoba Registered Trappers Association (MRTA)

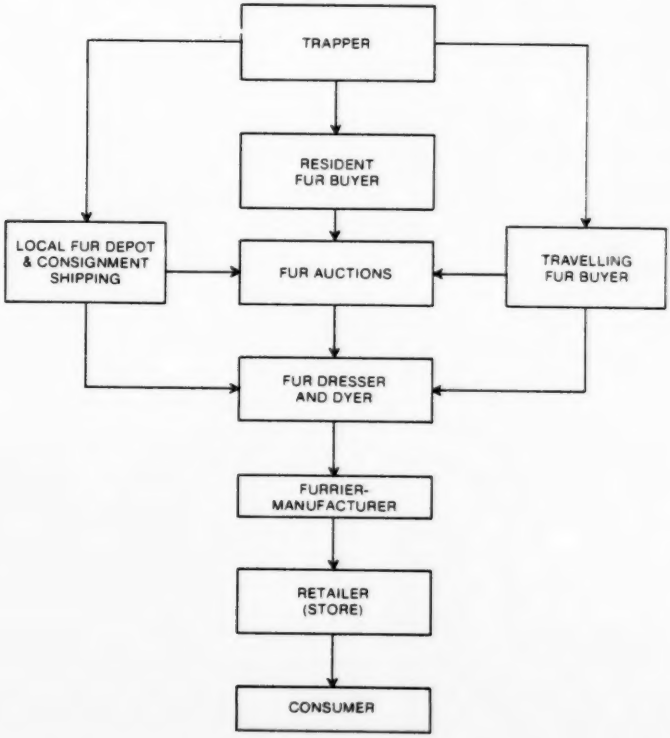
This organization provides a united voice for registered trappers in Manitoba. It is a forum where the problems confronting the fur industry can be identified and recommendations for appropriate action to resolve these problems may be pursued. MRTA is also a member of the Fur Institute of Canada, a national advocacy association which promotes an understanding of trapping by the general public. It represents the concerns of trappers both at home and in such major foreign markets as Europe and the United States.

Fur Marketing

Nineteen fur-bearing species are commonly trapped in Manitoba. Until the late 1970's three species — muskrat, mink and beaver — accounted for 70% to 80% of the total dollar value of raw furs harvested in Manitoba. During the 1980's however, the demand for long-haired pelts such as lynx, coyote and fox has increased significantly. Raw fur prices have traditionally varied very widely, not just from species to species but also from season to season. Prices reflect trends in international fashions and to a lesser extent, the number and quality of pelts taken.

The process of selling furs has changed a great deal since the Hudson's Bay Company first began trading in Manitoba. At that time the pound note or dollar bill were not the standard currency — the "made beaver" was. Native trappers exchanged their furs in face-to-face barter at a regional trading post for goods priced in "made beaver" pelts. A cast iron fry pan may have been worth one made beaver, or two otter skins (the equivalent of a made beaver). Today a trapper can choose either to sell his furs to a resident or travelling buyer or to sell them through a fur auction in Toronto or North Bay, Ontario. The major difference between the two selling methods is that a buyer usually pays a trapper immediately in cash for the furs. When a trapper ships his furs directly to an auction house, however, he must bear the uncertainty of bid prices and wait until the auction is complete to receive full value for his furs. Most auction houses do offer up to 60% of the received raw fur value as a cash advance, so most furs are sold through auction houses.

Manitoba
Normal Movement of Raw Furs — Producer to Consumer



Auctions are held six times a year, the largest one taking place in mid winter when the highest quality pelts are available. The auctions are attended by fur brokers and buyers from Europe, the United States, Japan and all the Canadian provinces.

In recent years professional RTL trappers representing only 11% of all trappers in Manitoba accounted for over 60% of the provincial wild fur harvest. During the 1979/80 season, Manitoba wild fur pelts generated about $10 million in primary income and $50 million in secondary, value-added income. On average, these values represent about 10% of the total Canadian raw fur production of $45 to $60 million per year which in turn contributes an estimated $600 million in value-added income to the entire Canadian economy.

Humane Trapping

Manitoba trappers are keenly aware that public sentiment favors humane trapping procedures. They themselves actively promote the use of humane procedures and equipment through local and national organizations like the Manitoba Registered Trappers Association (MRT,) and the Fur Institute of Canada. Indeed, even private advocacy groups such as the Canadian Association for Humane Trapping have endorsed their efforts.

Complete banning of the foothold trap, however, is not believed to be a practical solution. Trapping techniques and skills are developed and refined by individual trappers over many years. New techniques must be introduced over time, allowing trappers to learn without losing a significant amount of income. The complete replacement of equipment almost overnight may prove to be financially impossible for trappers in many communities. In addition to these concerns, successful alternatives to the foothold trap have not yet been developed.

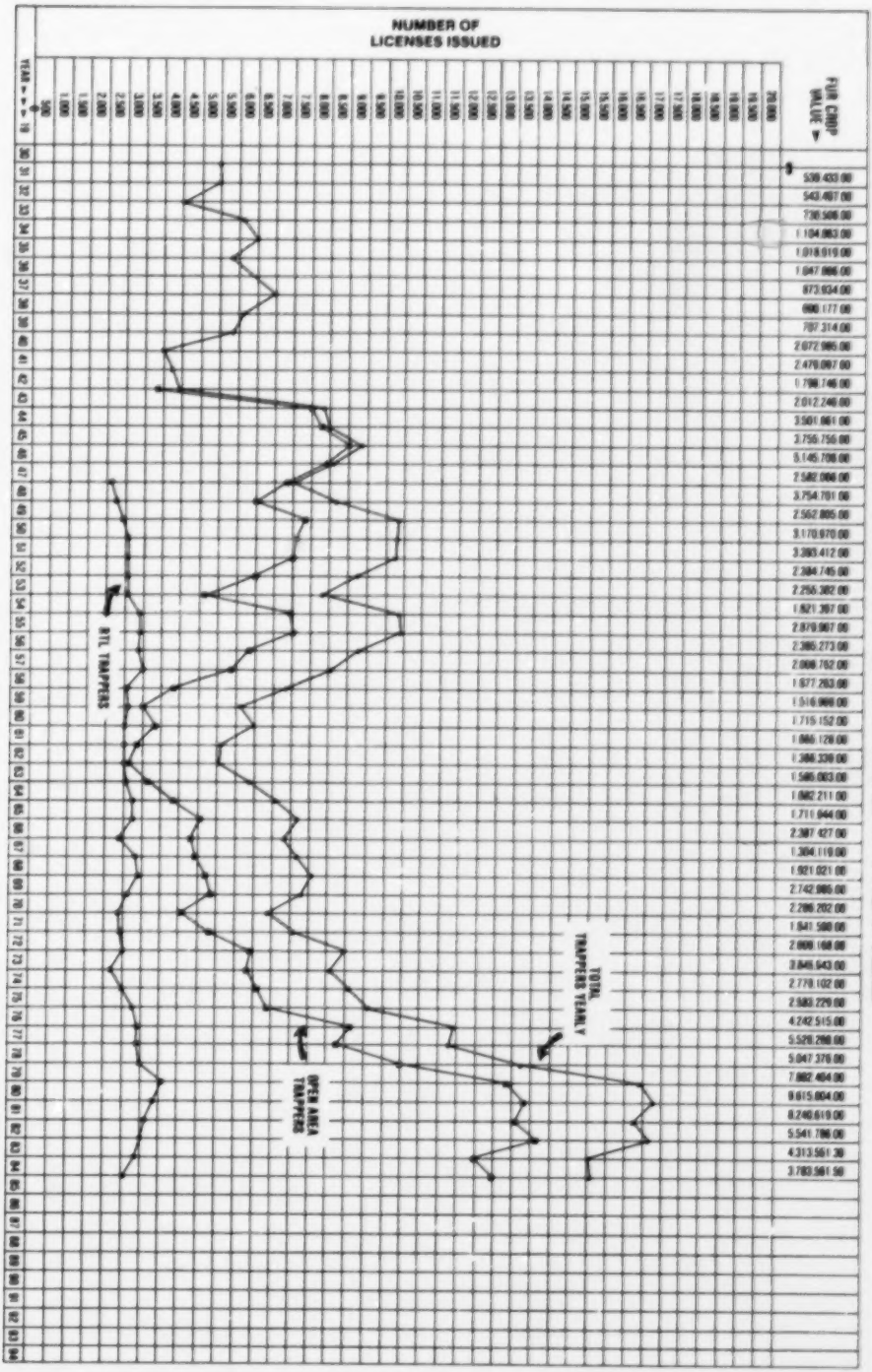
The Manitoba Government has been active in working with trappers to develop and test approved equipment. Through fur workshops, trappers are instructed in the use of new methods and new equipment. From time to time, the government has also provided financial assistance for trappers to convert to new equipment. Change over a reasonable number of years is being pursued as the best way to achieve full cooperation and widespread use of the desired procedures.

Wild Fur Management

In Manitoba no fur-bearing species is in danger of extinction. In fact, for some species, such as the beaver, twice as many animals could be harvested without posing a threat to its existence. Manitoba's professional wildlife managers are dedicated to conserving this resource and maintaining harvestable populations for years to come. To ensure the wise use and stewardship of the resource, the Manitoba Fur Management Program is designed to adjust the trapping season for each species, and where necessary, set quotas. Animal health and population trends are monitored by wildlife managers by collecting various biological data. Licences are issued to control the number of trappers in RTL areas and other designated areas. Rates and royalties are established by Order-in-Council, providing a direct source of revenue for the government.

Fur trading is an important part of Canada's heritage and a continuing part of its resource-based economy. For many it is not only a source of income, but a way of life. Although the wild fur trade is no longer the dominant income producing industry of our province, it still provides a sustaining livelihood for a significant group of Manitobans now and for the foreseeable future.

Facts About Manitoba's Fur Industry



1975/76 Fur Production and Value

	Number of Pelts	Average Value $	Total of Species Value $	% of Total Provincial Production Value
BADGER	858	34.50	29,601.00	.70
BEAR	453	65.00	29,445.00	.69
BEAVER	31,594	20.00	631,880.00	14.89
COYOTE	11,530	56.00	645,680.00	15.22
ERMINE	12,930	.90	11,637.00	.27
FISHER	911	97.00	88,367.00	2.08
FOX, Blue	11	45.00	495.00	.01
FOX, Cross	189	85.00	16,065.00	.38
FOX, Red	9,790	43.00	420,970.00	9.92
FOX, Silver	34	93.00	3,162.00	.07
FOX, White	261	42.00	10,962.00	.26
LYNX	761	257.00	195,577.00	4.61
MARTEN	650	24.00	15,600.00	.37
MINK	11,961	26.00	310,986.00	7.33
MUSKRAT	411,393	3.62	1,489,242.66	35.10
OTTER	2,518	60.00	151,080.00	3.56
RABBIT, Jack	154	—	—	—
RACCOON	4,120	22.00	90,640.00	2.14
SKUNK	2,863	—	—	—
SQUIRREL	82,162	.70	57,513.40	1.36
WOLF, Timber	383	101.00	38,683.00	.91
WOLVERINE	31	159.00	4,929.00	.12
TOTAL			4,242,515.06	

1984/85 Fur Production and Value

	Quantity	Average Price $	Value $	Approximate % of Total Value
BADGER	499	25.00	12,475.00	.26
BEAR	566	40.00	22,640.00	.47
BEAVER	33,812	29.00	980,548.00	20.47
COYOTE	10,400	69.00	717,600.00	15.00
ERMINE	10,649	2.50	26,622.50	.56
FISHER	3,569	196.00	699,524.00	14.62
FOX, Blue	23	25.00	575.00	.01
FOX, Cross	433	110.00	47,630.00	1.00
FOX, Red	10,078	37.00	372,886.00	7.79
FOX, Silver	116	60.00	6,960.00	.15
FOX, White	245	22.00	5,390.00	.11
LYNX & BOBCAT	419	700.00	293,300.00	6.13
MARTEN	5,001	65.00	325,065.00	6.79
MINK	11,976	37.00	443,112.00	9.26
MUSKRAT	181,123	3.25	588,649.75	12.30
OTTER	2,078	36.00	74,808.00	1.56
RABBIT, Jack	0	0	0	0
RACCOON	3,956	25.00	98,900.00	2.07
SKUNK	0	0	0	0
SQUIRREL	23,219	1.00	23,219.00	.49
WOLF, Timber	283	92.00	26,036.00	.54
WOLVERINE	92	202.00	18,584.00	.39
TOTAL			4,784,524.25	100

RTL Total Production Value $ 1975-1985

(based on average auction values)

	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
BADGER	379.50	729.92	1,849.65	6,464.00	8,140.00	4,100.00	288.00	136.00	280.00	100.00
BEAR	10,205.00	3,737.28	4,580.00	5,780.00	9,702.00	9,240.00	2,296.65	3,400.00	4,988.00	3,200.00
BEAVER	516,580.00	647,376.66	515,573.75	546,854.00	1,945,059.00	1,190,040.00	407,627.50	268,957.00	394,120.00	620,281.00
COYOTE	43,120.00	42,899.94	42,803.20	98,820.00	90,852.00	101,025.00	89,134.16	88,522.50	39,652.00	43,194.00
ERMINE	5,889.60	7,354.16	7,337.16	14,703.00	15,533.70	8,694.00	7,842.00	3,668.50	5,545.00	12,440.00
FISHER	74,399.00	90,235.98	109,620.45	173,420.00	333,797.00	361,400.00	430,280.00	517,536.00	450,450.00	505,876.00
FOX, Blue	315.00	285.52	166.10	300.00	225.00	36.00	—	207.20	—	—
FOX, Cross	8,670.00	16,568.21	50,487.85	103,350.00	104,575.00	96,700.00	114,147.60	73,854.00	25,840.00	31,790.00
FOX, Red	19,909.00	44,387.42	102,276.77	253,176.00	337,321.00	304,430.00	222,138.00	127,485.00	49,883.00	43,993.00
FOX, Silver	1,953.00	1,588.31	13,736.00	19,575.00	29,792.00	16,625.00	14,640.00	5,071.50	3,074.00	2,100.00
FOX, White	8,190.00	31,107.18	18,149.04	6,435.00	37,582.00	14,837.00	1,584.60	26,028.00	651.00	3,542.00
LYNX	167,821.00	328,014.04	1,008,409.80	1,481,720.00	867,123.00	1,067,330.00	1,023,876.00	487,084.00	141,750.00	253,400.00
MARTEN	31,488.00	27,538.88	34,671.87	52,514.00	71,851.50	52,779.00	114,314.46	149,156.00	186,180.00	287,040.00
MINK	165,464.00	228,204.74	275,044.96	321,250.00	749,662.00	467,649.00	285,660.00	134,792.00	111,916.00	296,592.00
MUSKRAT	566,417.78	536,465.72	425,028.17	97,833.80	920,277.60	1,035,178.20	210,877.00	163,691.55	329,014.40	345,114.25
OTTER	137,220.00	146,844.24	171,920.80	154,980.00	219,780.00	143,000.00	82,368.00	61,677.00	60,102.00	66,996.00
RABBIT, Jack	—	—	—	.75	—	—	—	—	—	—
RACCOON	1,518.00	7,595.36	5,676.48	18,480.00	40,602.00	25,311.00	9,756.90	5,355.00	5,060.00	5,700.00
SKUNK	—	—	97.60	140.00	291.50	672.00	280.00	—	—	—
SQUIRREL	30,156.70	19,951.20	20,858.04	46,747.50	62,246.80	66,138.00	31,560.50	17,208.00	5,604.00	9,195.00
WOLF, Timber	18,079.00	13,782.56	25,323.74	27,390.00	29,028.00	22,971.00	27,060.00	19,610.00	15,106.00	14,168.00
WOLVERINE	3,816.00	4,234.75	5,600.00	14,175.00	11,232.00	13,725.00	18,859.50	24,921.00	13,640.00	15,554.00
TOTAL	1,811,590.58	2,198,902.07	2,839,211.43	3,444,108.05	5,884,673.10	5,001,880.20	3,094,590.87	2,178,360.25	1,842,855.40	2,560,275.25

Open Area Total Production Value $ 1975-1985
(based on average auction values)

	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
BADGER	29,221.50	66,021.14	55,433.45	84,861.00	33,744.00	19,000.00	24,624.00	15,436.00	13,412.00	12,375.00
BEAR	19,240.00	12,384.34	21,513.88	43,945.00	18,942.00	19,152.00	11,746.80	35,800.00	34,394.00	19,440.00
BEAVER	115,300.00	367,738.56	231,067.89	1,032,939.00	753,225.00	442,740.00	177,612.18	148,087.00	230,560.00	360,267.00
COYOTE	602,560.00	529,215.52	384,256.00	589,770.00	325,821.00	273,600.00	499,657.92	466,033.50	354,522.00	674,406.00
ERMINE	5,747.40	15,850.90	12,239.28	29,874.00	29,225.70	14,586.00	11,914.00	—	7,485.00	14,182.50
FISHER	13,968.00	19,355.22	14,616.06	52,925.00	31,363.00	34,190.00	53,475.00	142,704.00	212,250.00	193,648.00
FOX, Blue	180.00	71.38	132.88	60.00	180.00	144.00	—	51.80	825.00	575.00
FOX, Cross	7,395.00	7,470.06	7,320.20	17,680.00	2,136.00	18,800.00	22,020.60	—	11,210.00	15,840.00
FOX, Red	401,061.00	528,945.34	453,865.96	669,240.00	403,635.00	357,140.00	622,251.00	547,236.00	369,806.50	291,967.00
FOX, Silver	1,209.00	5,418.94	2,197.76	4,185.00	2,527.00	4,370.00	3,180.00	1,621.50	1,740.00	4,800.00
FOX, White	2,772.00	13,433.60	3,961.10	4,420.00	7,084.00	7,363.00	2,710.00	8,748.00	1,596.00	1,848.00
LYNX	27,756.00	38,675.20	78,643.28	329,800.00	207,888.00	161,820.00	305,694.00	177,973.00	66,850.00	39,900.00
MARTEN	—	1,364.35	2,313.00	9,548.00	3,591.00	20,586.00	25,134.00	9,261.00	16,620.00	38,025.00
MINK	145,572.00	299,268.29	179,878.56	185,850.00	319,705.00	301,470.00	229,942.50	152,598.00	92,876.00	146,520.00
MUSKRAT	922,824.88	1,168,686.19	513,862.87	855,317.10	1,249,168.00	1,263,744.60	228,521.25	335,408.04	426,121.60	243,535.50
OTTER	13,860.00	15,007.29	16,856.20	156,780.00	16,698.00	11,990.00	8,096.00	10,724.50	6,888.00	7,812.00
RABBIT, Jack	—	—	—	54.00	—	—	—	—	—	—
RACCOON	89,122.00	183,699.94	141,281.28	245,238.00	193,328.50	151,206.00	116,467.50	80,535.00	62,722.00	93,200.00
SKUNK	—	—	224.48	2,500.00	2,139.50	825.00	819.00	—	—	—
SQUIRREL	27,356.70	32,521.60	57,939.00	89,154.90	104,650.00	105,310.50	68,030.60	42,015.00	13,377.00	14,024.00
WOLF, Timber	20,604.00	22,553.28	28,104.96	31,680.00	18,880.00	16,275.00	29,964.00	19,610.00	16,351.00	10,948.00
WOLVERINE	1,113.00	1,693.90	2,450.00	2,475.00	6,999.00	3,477.00	5,334.00	5,112.00	1,100.00	3,030.00
TOTAL	2,446,862.48	3,329,375.04	2,208,158.09	4,438,296.00	3,730,929.70	3,227,789.10	2,447,194.35	2,198,954.34	1,940,706.10	2,186,343.00